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Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8219th meeting
Friday, 30 March 2018, 7.40 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Van Oosterom	(Netherlands)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Lie Cheng
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Dah
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mr. Michon
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mr. Miller

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 7.40 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: I propose that the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of the observer State Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in that regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Acting Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I refer to note S/2017/507 and encourage members and non-members of the Council to limit their statements to five minutes or less, and the briefer to the agreed time limit.

I now give the floor to Mr. Zerihoun.

Mr. Zerihoun: As Council members know, today's March of Return near the Gaza fence has, unfortunately, resulted in violence. Based on the information at our disposal, around 30,000 people participated in and around a march at various locations in Gaza. Soon after the demonstration started, the situation deteriorated in several locations. Late afternoon, local time, the Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza confirmed that at least 15 Palestinians had been killed and more than 1,000 had been injured, including by tear gas suffocation. Several of the casualties were reportedly the result of live ammunition used by the Israeli security forces during the march, but also following armed clashes between Palestinian and Israeli security forces, including the shelling of a Hamas observation point.

Reports indicate that most of the demonstrators stayed well away from the border fence and did not engage in violence. However, there are also reports that some protesters engaged in stone throwing and violent behaviour — some reportedly carrying weapons. According to Israeli security forces reports, militants tried to get through the fence in an attempt to plant explosives. Palestinians reportedly also sent a nine-year-old girl across the fence, but Israeli troops were able to send her safely back. Hamas leaders reportedly were also present at some of the gatherings. Prior to the march, Israel had increased its forces around the border, deploying snipers, special units and drones, and sent out warnings that it would act to prevent any breach of the border fence or violation of Israel's sovereignty.

Violence also broke out in the West Bank, with an estimated 900 Palestinians demonstrating, mostly in central West Bank cities, such as Ramallah and Hebron. According to the Palestine Red Crescent Society, 27 Palestinians were wounded during clashes near Nablus.

In his Security Council briefing earlier this week (see S/PV.8214), Special Coordinator Mladenov noted the developing Palestinian plans for today's march, and called on all to exercise restraint and to take the necessary steps to avoid violent escalation. In statements to the media, he reiterated those calls and emphasized the need to ensure that civilians, particularly children, should not be put in harm's way. The Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority (UNSCO) has also engaged with the Israel Defense Forces and Palestinian factions, particularly in Gaza, to reinforce the same messages.

In order to ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel, the Department of Safety and Security issued repeated security advisories to all staff. Throughout the day, UNSCO has been in contact with both Palestinian and Israeli security forces and will continue to do so as more demonstrations are expected throughout the next six weeks. There is fear that the situation might deteriorate in the coming days. We will continue to underline that it is imperative that civilians, in particular children, not be targeted and that all actors refrain from putting children at risk at any time. Israel must uphold its responsibilities under international human rights and humanitarian law. Lethal force should be used only as a last resort, with any resulting fatalities properly investigated by the authorities. We therefore also continue to urge Israeli security forces to exercise maximum restraint to avoid casualties.

The developments in Gaza today are another painful reminder of the consequences of a missing

peace between Israel and Palestine and the need to step up our efforts in support of a peaceful resolution of the conflict. As the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator have repeatedly reminded the Security Council, the United Nations strongly urges Palestinians, Israelis and the international community to take concrete measures to reverse the current course of the conflict and advance the goal of a just and sustainable peace based on the two-State solution.

The President: I thank Mr. Zerihoun for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having swiftly responded and convened this important meeting. We would also like to thank Mr. Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing today.

Four days ago in the Security Council (see S/PV.8214), we heard a briefing by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov on the status of the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), at which he talked about the demonstration that took place today in Gaza. As is usual during the occasions when the defenceless Palestinian people take to the streets to peacefully reaffirm their right to an independent State, we have seen the policy of Israeli arrogance and oppression in action. Today, tens of thousands of brotherly Palestinian people have taken to the streets in Gaza. They have participated in a peaceful demonstration as they do every year on 30 March to commemorate Land Day, express their attachment to their land and their national identity, and underscore their legitimate and inalienable political rights, guaranteed by international treaties, laws and norms.

The Israeli occupation has continued for more than 50 years now. Israel's illegal and illegitimate expansionist activities continue in Palestinian occupied territory, including east Jerusalem. They are flagrant violations of relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2334 (2016).

The State of Kuwait condemns in the strongest terms the Israeli actions today, which have left at least 15 Palestinians dead and more than 1,400 injured. Let us be clear. What happened today was a peaceful demonstration pertaining to the right of defenceless people. This right was responded to with the direct targeting of civilians, in flagrant violation of international human rights law. The perpetrators of today's crime must be brought to justice.

The Palestinian people cannot be an exception to international commitments and international law, including the commitment to protecting civilians from atrocities and grave violations. Israel, the occupying Power, must honour its commitments, in line with the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons. We strongly support international protection for the Palestinian people in the occupied territory, and addressing the practices and policies of the repressive Israeli occupation authority.

It is very important not to separate what happened today from the overall context. The Gaza Strip is still under blockade and has been so for more than 10 years now. Some of those who participated in the demonstration today are refugees who have been negatively impacted by the decrease in contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. What happened today is the result of more than 50 years of occupation. Numerous international reports have reiterated the degree to which living conditions have deteriorated in Gaza. When no response is made to such practices, policies and continued attacks against the defenceless Palestinian people and their legitimate rights, this will be the usual result, and we are definitely going to see more of such distressing incidents. Consequently, and as a first step, we are going to distribute a press statement to the Member States for review and adoption by the Security Council. In fact, as Mr. Zerihoun said, these incidents are a painful reminder of the need to achieve a lasting peace in the Middle East as soon as possible.

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait emphasizes the importance of forcing Israel, the occupying Power, to respect and implement the relevant Security Council resolutions. We reiterate that any just and comprehensive peace must be a strategic one, and that in order to achieve it, the entire Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories must end and the Palestinian people be permitted to exercise their inalienable rights. Those rights include the right to establish an independent and full sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, along the borders of 4 June 1967, based on resolutions of international legitimacy and those of the United Nations, the principle of land for peace, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mr. Miller (United States of America): We note that the representative of Israel is unable to attend today's meeting, owing to the fact that it is taking place during the celebration of Passover. It is extremely unfortunate that Israel is not able to participate in the discussion of this very important matter. It is also vital that the Council take a balanced approach to all matters that come before it, and we should have found an arrangement enabling all the parties to participate this evening.

Turning to the issue of Gaza, we are deeply saddened by the loss of life there today. We urge those involved to take steps to lower tensions and reduce the risk of new clashes. Bad actors who use protests as a cover for inciting violence endanger innocent lives. The international community, including the United States, is focused on taking concrete near-term steps that will improve the humanitarian and economic conditions in Gaza and the lives of the Palestinians living there. We are also hard at work on a plan for peace that will provide a future for both Israel and the Palestinians. Violence furthers neither of those goals.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun for his briefing. We in the Russian Federation are deeply concerned about the tragic events in the Gaza Strip. We are alarmed about the reports of an increase in the number of victims and casualties resulting from the Israeli army's efforts to restrain Palestinian protest actions, which began on 30 March as part of the so-called March of Return in a campaign lasting several days. We call on the Palestinian and Israeli sides to show restraint and to refrain from actions that could result in the deaths of innocent civilians. What is on the agenda is the urgent need to mobilize diplomatic mediation efforts aimed at de-escalating the situation around the Gaza Strip.

We should all understand that it is impossible to resolve the situation by putting out the fires that periodically flare up in the Palestinian territories. The relapses are inevitable and what is needed is a strategy for a settlement. The tragic events going on now make the task of achieving inter-Palestinian reconciliation as soon as possible even more urgent. In cooperation with our regional partners, especially Egypt, we are determined to continue our efforts to unite Palestinians around the political platform of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which we see as essential both for the economic revival of the Gaza Strip and for a practical way to realize the aspirations of the Palestinian people to establish their own independent State, coexisting in peace and security with Israel within internationally recognized borders.

The path to that goal is through convening direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis on all final-status issues, including Jerusalem. Any settlement should be based on the generally recognized international legal framework, including the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. We affirm our readiness to provide a Russian platform for a meeting between Palestinian and Israeli leaders. The tragic history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has shown once again that the longer the political process is postponed, the more often unilateral steps are taken that make relaunching it even harder. The Israeli settlement activities in the Palestinian territories, which are contrary to international law, along with provocative rhetoric and violence, are not conducive in any way to creating the conditions for starting direct talks.

It is crucial that we continue to ensure that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) can do its work effectively. We welcome the outcome of the conference held in Rome on 15 March in support of UNRWA, whose budget Russia contributes to regularly. Right now what is especially needed is a well-coordinated effort, every day, on the part of the entire international community. It is important to take action together and at the regional level. In that regard, we note the forthcoming summit of the League of Arab States in Riyadh in April. We hope that its agenda will be genuinely unifying and constructive, designed to overcome the obstacles to political and socioeconomic restoration in the Middle East and North Africa and to develop confidence- and security-building measures for the entire region.

For its part, Russia will continue its efforts to find a way out of the impasse in the long-standing Arab-Israeli conflict and to help to stabilize the situation in the region as a whole. In that regard, the proposal of Russia's Minister for Foreign Affairs Lavrov to conduct a comprehensive Security Council review of the situation in the Middle East, with the aim of identifying areas for joint efforts to stabilize the situation in the region and settle its many crises, old and new, is very relevant.

Mr. Dah (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Acting Under-Secretary-General for

Political Affairs for his briefing on the events happening in Gaza. Needless to say, we are seriously concerned about the gravity of the situation that has led to the loss of lives there. My delegation condemns these acts and urges the parties involved to avoid any escalation of the violence. We want to affirm our principled position on this issue, which is that only through dialogue and political compromise can we find a peaceful solution to the conflict in the region. Once again, we will continue to follow the evolving situation closely and we will definitely comment on it again in the next few days.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I would like to start by agreeing with my colleague from the United States that it is a shame that our Israeli colleagues are unable to participate owing to the start of Passover this evening.

The United Kingdom is appalled by the deaths and injuries suffered during today's events on Gaza's borders. There must be an immediate end to the violence. We call for calm, restraint and respect for international law. All the parties must engage constructively in order to bring an end to the violence.

We have long been concerned about the situation in Gaza and have been warning of the risks of an upsurge in violence. That is not an issue that can simply be managed over the long term. We need an urgent and durable agreement that addresses the underlying causes of the conflict and transforms the situation in Gaza. An agreement should ensure that Hamas and other terrorist groups permanently end rocket fire and attacks against Israel, that the Palestinian Authority resumes control of Gaza and restores effective and accountable governance, and that Israel lifts its restrictions in order to ease the suffering of ordinary Palestinians.

We remain committed to supporting vulnerable Gazans, including through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and we urge all parties to prioritize progress towards reaching a durable solution that alleviates the suffering of the Gazan people, in line with resolution 1860 (2009).

Every Israeli and Palestinian has the right to live in peace and security. We acknowledge both the right of Palestinians to freedom of assembly and protest, as well as the right of Israelis to security. What is needed now is a renewed commitment for negotiations towards a two-State solution. To have the best chance of success, peace must take place in an atmosphere free from violence. It is time for all parties to work together in the spirit of compromise and understanding to make progress towards that two-State solution. The ongoing violence today simply underlines that a just and lasting resolution that ends the occupation and delivers peace for Palestinians and Israelis is long overdue.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): We are appalled by the regrettable loss of life and the large number of wounded today, including children, who all seem to be Palestinian. There must now be an immediate and proper investigation by the authorities. It appears that the Israeli security forces have used live ammunition, which has exacerbated the gravity of the situation. The use of force must always be proportional and lethal force should be used only as a last resort. Israel must uphold its responsibilities under international human rights law and respect the right to peaceful protest. We also note with concern the air strikes carried out by Israel in Gaza.

The situation should not be a surprise to the Council. Special Coordinator Mladenov warned us only a few days ago about the risks of escalating violence in and around Gaza. The situation is extremely worrisome. Our focus must now be on avoiding further violent escalation on the ground. All parties and, in particular, Israeli security forces must exercise maximum restraint.

As we know from previous briefings in the Chamber, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is terrible. Gaza is on the verge of collapse. A sustainable solution must urgently be sought, including an end to the Israeli closure policy. Gaza is an integral part of the State of Palestine and cannot be separated from the broader political context, including the much needed peace efforts leading to a two-State solution.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We deplore the fact that almost at the end of your presidency, Sir, and following the receptions held on Wednesday and Thursday, we must now call upon you to exercise the role of president in the light of today's incident. Given the urgency of the situation, we thank Kuwait for its initiative and the President for convening today's emergency meeting in response to the grave events in Israel and Palestine.

Equatorial Guinea is paying close attention to the developments surrounding the Great March of Return organized by Palestinian civil society and political organizations, which has resulted in the death of 15 Palestinians and left several injured on the Gaza strip.

We deplore the loss of human lives and extend our deepest sympathy to the families affected.

In the statement made by the delegation of Equatorial Guinea on the Palestinian question (see S/PV.8214), we invited the parties to refrain from committing acts that could lead to violence. We reiterate that same request today. There must be an immediate and permanent end to the violence, and each party must comply with international law, pursuant to the relevant United Nations resolutions. In that regard, we condemn the attempt to assassinate the Palestinian Prime Minister.

The solution to the Palestinian question will be found only through dialogue and politics. It is for that reason that we call on the parties to resolve their differences at the negotiating table regardless of how difficult it might be. It is likely that both parties will have to make concessions and that not all of their aspirations and demands will be met — that is dialogue. Negotiations must take place within the framework of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. The two-State solution, according to which Palestinians and Israelis shall live in peace and security, is the only fair solution. Intra-Palestinian dialogue must continue. Palestinians must be able to resolve their differences. We would ask the international community to pursue its efforts to foster dialogue among the parties and to refrain from actions that could be counterproductive to peaceful coexistence among Palestinians and Israelis.

The situation has become very worrisome, given that the number of people who died as a result of the demonstrations has exceeded the number of victims since the end of the war in Gaza in 2014. Since then, there has been a period of relative calm. In that regard, we support the idea put forward by Kuwait for the Security Council to issue a communiqué calling on Israelis and Palestinians to put an immediate end to the violence that could escalate and cause the already critical and delicate situation to deteriorate.

Mr. Michon (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Kuwait for requesting the holding of today's emergency meeting and the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his briefing. Given his worrisome description of the situation, I would like to make three comments.

First, we are very concerned about today's developments, which have exacerbated an already tense situation in the Gaza Strip. The response of the Israeli security forces to last-minute protests has left a number of dead and hundreds with bullet wounds. The threshold for violence has been crossed. As we wait for light to be shed on the incident, I should like to remind the Council about two very important issues: first, respect for international humanitarian law, in particular the importance of protecting civilians, and, secondly, respect for the right of Palestinians to hold peaceful demonstrations. Measures taken by Israel to protect itself — a concern we all share — must take those issues into account. We call on Israel to demonstrate discretion, restraint and proportional use of force. We urge protesters to refrain from violence.

There is a very real risk of an escalation of violence, which we mentioned at Wednesday's open debate (see S/PV.8218). Another conflict could erupt in Gaza. There are calls for frequent protests to be held until 15 May. Conditions are therefore conducive to an upsurge in violence. There is a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, which will only deteriorate due to the financial difficulties of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The intra-Palestinian reconciliation process has been at a standstill since the assassination attempt against the Palestinian Prime Minister on 13 February, which we firmly condemn. At the same time, the security situation has deteriorated with the use of improvised explosive devices, which have targeted Israeli soldiers along the Israel-Gaza security barrier in recent weeks, and offensive tunnels to prepare for attacks launched from the Gaza Strip. We condemn all such actions.

All indicators are still red, and, in the absence of a political perspective that offers hope to the populations, the situation is very worrying. In that context, it is important that we support the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza so that it can fully exercise its prerogatives in the Gaza Strip, including in the area of security. That process must also be accompanied by a lifting of the blockade, along with credible security guarantees for Israel.

Finally, we must not dissociate the situation in Gaza from the Palestinian question as a whole. Palestinian unity is an essential element of a just and lasting peace based on the perspective of the two States. It is essential that we call for an early resumption of serious negotiations with a view to implementing the two-State solution.

In conclusion, we believe it is essential for the Council to remain actively seized of the matter and, as requested by Kuwait, to express its support for protecting civilians and avoiding any disproportionate response.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): My delegation is grateful to the Kuwaiti delegation for calling for today's meeting on the situation unfolding in Gaza. We also express our appreciation to Assistant Secretary-General Tayé-Brook Zerihoun for his comprehensive and objective update.

We are very concerned about the increasing death toll caused by the escalation of violence on the border of the Gaza Strip and Israel. My delegation wishes to convey its condolences to the Palestinian people for the tragic death of civilians during what was supposed to be a peaceful demonstration. We consider this occurrence to be an irreparable and senseless loss of life.

Kazakhstan also fully supports the right of the Palestinian people to self-expression and peaceful demonstrations. It is very important that Israeli soldiers correctly calibrate the volume of force used against peaceful demonstrators. We join the position of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which we, along with Kuwait and Côte d'Ivoire, represent in the Security Council, with condemnation of the use of weapons against them. We believe this turn of events could be a dangerous development in the situation in the Middle East region as a whole. In that regard, Kazakhstan calls on both sides to the conflict to exercise restraint. We also consider it necessary to conduct a thorough investigation into the incident, identify the perpetrators and hold them accountable for what happened.

Kazakhstan considers it important to continue efforts aimed at consolidating Palestinian ranks in the Palestine Liberation Organization political platform as a necessary condition for the practical realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to create their own independent State. We note that the parties must find a solution for the difficult humanitarian situation in Gaza.

The current situation requires coming up with confidence-building measures for an entire region, including in the economic field, with strong support from the international community. In that regard, Kazakhstan endorses the concern expressed earlier by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process on the funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East this year (see S/PV.8214). A significant reduction of its regular budget has already increased the anxieties of 5.3 million Palestinian refugees who have already suffered an extremely protracted refugee crisis. Kazakhstan also expresses great concern over the expansion of settlements, which are illegal under international law and in the view of the Middle East Quartet, and which are further escalating the tense situation around the status of Jerusalem, resulting in protests among populations.

Lastly, we call upon the leaders of Israel and Palestine to take concrete steps to preserve the possibility of peaceful coexistence and the two-State solution and strengthen the prospects for peace. As we always say in the Security Council, this effort should be based on the inalienable rights of Palestinians to statehood and of Israel to security. But we would now also like to underline Palestine's inalienable right to security. It is necessary to begin negotiations in the very near future on each outstanding problem, aimed at reaching agreement on pending issues and giving them a so-called final status. Only innovative policy, with a security-development nexus, a revamped regional approach and a more transparent, efficient and accountable United Nations delivering as one on the ground, will help the parties to escape the kind of tragedy that has occurred today.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the information provided by Assistant Secretary-General Tayé-Brook Zerihoun. We are also grateful to the Permanent Mission of Kuwait for requesting this important meeting, and to the presidency for convening it in such a timely manner.

Today we woke up to the alarming news that, as a result of violent repression by Israeli security forces, 15 people had been killed and more than 1,200 wounded. All of them were innocent civilians participating in the Great March of Return. The Plurinational State of Bolivia strongly condemns Israel's disproportionate violent military action against the Palestinian population and calls on the Government of Israel to refrain from the use of violence and respect international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians.

The exacerbation in, and trends of, violence in Gaza are the result of 70 years of unresolved and persistent conflict, including 50 years of illegal occupation of Palestinian territories by the occupying Power, Israel,

and the inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has led to a catastrophic humanitarian situation. As long as this situation persists, a just and lasting peace for both peoples will be less and less likely.

During the past 50 years, Israeli policies of dispossession and occupation have filled the Palestinian people with suffering. In January 2018 alone, the Israeli authorities demolished or seized 32 Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank, and last week we were informed of the Israeli Government's decision to build 1,500 new settlements in Area C. We call on the Government of Israel to cease the expropriation of Palestinian land and halt the expansion of the settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, in accordance with resolution 2334 (2016).

We are also convinced that the announcement by some States to change the location of their embassies to the city of Jerusalem will only increase tensions in the region and lead to an escalation of violence of great proportions. As a pacifist country, Bolivia sees the path of dialogue and negotiation with clear expressions of political will from both sides for achieving a two-State solution to be the only alternative that can guarantee a just and lasting peace in the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

We therefore reaffirm our full commitment to multilateralism and international law and reiterate our support for all international efforts leading to a peaceful solution, such as the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, inter alia, which will guarantee a just and lasting peace and allow both peoples to live within recognized and secure borders. We also reiterate that the only long-term solution is the two-State solution, which finally consolidates a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 internationally recognized borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Mr. Woldegerima (Ethiopia): I will be very brief. We thank you, Mr. President, for responding to the request for the convening of today's meeting. We express our gratitude to Assistant Secretary-General and Acting Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Tayé-Brook Zerihoun for his briefing on the latest in the situation on the ground. What happened in Gaza is undoubtedly tragic. We would like to raise two or three matters at this time.

The first and most important issue is the fact that, unless there is a return to the peace process and real progress is made towards resolving the underlying crisis, this kind of tragedy is bound to happen again and again. We discussed this point earlier this week, and we agree with what Acting Under-Secretary-General Zerihoun said with regard to finding a sustainable and lasting solution. In fact, the possibility of a further deterioration of the situation cannot be ruled out, as some have already said, and that has always concerned us.

Secondly, we express our sorrow over the loss of life and the wounding of many. Undoubtedly, it is a sad day.

Thirdly, we believe that what is most important now is for all parties to exercise self-restraint and for the Security Council to follow the matter very closely.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the holding of this emergency meeting and for the briefing by Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun.

Peru is following with deep concern the situation in Gaza. We deplore and mourn the death of at least 15 Palestinians, and we note that hundreds of others have been injured. We point out that the violence continues to increase in the form of both parties' violent rhetoric, and, effectively, Hamas might be interested in provoking an escalation. Nonetheless, we note that the unsustainable status quo puts off the need to address the root causes of the conflict, and that the humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate.

We recognize the right of Palestinians to demonstrate peacefully based on their freedom of speech and assembly. We also condemn any attack or attempt to carry out a terrorist attack, and we acknowledge the right of Israel to legitimately defend itself in accordance with the principles of proportionality, caution and legality. In that regard, we condemn the disproportionate use of force under international law and international humanitarian law. Moreover, we note that the situation was not unforeseeable. Several days ago when we meet with Mr. Mladenov (see S/PV.8214), we expressed our concern about the risk of an escalation and underscored the need to protect civilians. Accordingly, we reiterate the need for the United Nations and those countries with influence in the region to take urgent measures so as to prevent further violence and protect civilians.

Lastly, we call all parties to act with restraint, avoid further escalation and facilitate an environment of reduced tensions that will enable achieving the two-State solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Mr. Lie Cheng (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Acting Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his emergency-meeting briefing. We thank Kuwait for proposing the holding of this meeting, and the presidency of the Netherlands for quickly organizing it.

We note that the situation in Gaza is very tense, and we are following it very closely. We are concerned about the fact that many people have been killed or injured. We call for implementing all the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), halting all settlement activities in the occupied territories and taking all measures to prevent violence against civilians. All parties should remain calm and exercise restraint, meet one another halfway and create the necessary environment for resuming talks. Parties with major influence on countries in the Middle East should also play a constructive role in that regard.

The question of Palestine is the foundational issue underlying achieving peace in the Middle East. We call for the unity of the Security Council and the international community and for continued efforts to advance the political settlement of the question of Palestine. The two-State solution is the correct way to resolve the issue. We must adhere to the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative, based upon which we must step up efforts to push for the resumption of talks.

China firmly supports and promotes the peace process in the Middle East and supports the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State by the Palestinian people based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. China will continue to actively promote President Xi Jinping's four-point proposal for settling the Palestinian question and will continue to play a constructive role in the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): Let me first thank Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Acting Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

Along with the delegations of the United States and the United Kingdom, I would like also to note the fact that the representative of Israel unfortunately could not participate in this meeting because of the Passover holiday.

We are following the latest developments in the Gaza Strip with great concern. Unfortunately, recent events have only confirmed how tense the security situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory is. We strongly condemn the current escalation of violence. We also emphasize that any use of force should be proportional. We call for respect of international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians.

Poland condemns all acts of terrorism and incitement to violence. They constitute a significant obstacle to the de-escalation of tensions. We called on both parties to condemn all acts of terror. At the same time, we encourage the parties to the conflict to take actions aimed at de-escalating tensions and calming the situation on the ground.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Let me start with expressing our regret that the representative of Israel cannot participate in this debate because of Passover — an important religious holiday in Israel.

I will address three points: first, the increasing tensions around Gaza; secondly, the short-term steps needed to stop the crisis; and, thirdly, the need for long-term stability.

Concerning my first point, we are deeply alarmed by the rising tensions around Gaza. Reports of 15 deaths and hundreds of injured are highly disturbing and regrettable.

With regard to my second point, concerning short-term steps to stop the crisis, we call on all sides to exercise restraint and prevent further escalation and loss of lives. We call on the de facto authorities in Gaza to maintain the peaceful character of the protests and prevent them from becoming violent. We call on Israel to ensure that its responses at all times are proportionate and necessary. The use of live ammunition as a crowd-control effort should be used only as a measure of last resort. We call on Israel to thoroughly investigate all incidents in which the use of crowd-control measures has led to casualties. The incidents of the past week

whereby armed individuals from Gaza have entered Israel show that Israel's security concerns are real. We condemn those attacks and repeat that there is no excuse for terrorism. We call on all parties to refrain from any action that would worsen the situation by way of incitement or provocation. We also call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law and protect civilians.

With regard to my third point, concerning long-term stability, the situation in Gaza has been a matter of concern for a long time. In recent months, the Council has debated the situation in Gaza several times. We recall that, in order to achieve a sustainable solution, a comprehensive approach is required. A political process, humanitarian aid, economic development and infrastructure development go hand in hand. We need the Palestinian Authority as the legitimate Government to return to Gaza. We call on the Palestinian Authority and all other Palestinian parties to continue their efforts to overcome their differences and to genuinely proceed with reconciliation.

All those measures, together with the two-State solution as a political horizon, are needed to ensure that we will not be having the same debate once again next month, next year or in five years.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Allow me at the outset to thank Kuwait for requesting this emergency meeting, and you, Sir, for accommodating that request in a very speedy manner.

I also want to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his briefing at the beginning of this meeting.

Before I deliver my statement, I would like to say a few words in Arabic, mainly addressed to our people in the occupied Palestinian territories.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

At the outset, I wish to commend our steadfast and valiant people all across the occupied territory of the State of Palestine, including our people in the Gaza Strip, Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank, as well as our people living inside the Green Line and in the diaspora, as they commemorate Land Day and the March of Return. We bow respectfully to our heroic martyrs and wounded, and we stress their leading role always.

We condemn in the strongest terms today's heinous massacre and we call for an end to it. We demand that those who are responsible be brought to justice and call for international protection for civilians in the occupied territory. The Security Council must uphold its responsibility and take a stance in condemning the massacre in order to put an end to it and protect our civilians. If that effort is blocked and the Council is unable to assume its responsibilities, those responsible must also bear the responsibility for covering up and protecting the Israeli criminals instead of stopping them.

(*spoke in English*)

We come before the Security Council today with a sense of repugnance and urgency in light of Israel's latest campaign of military aggression and attacks against the defenceless Palestinian civilian population, in grave breach of international law, including international humanitarian law and the relevant provisions regarding the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Today, at least 17 Palestinian civilians have been killed and more than 1,400 injured — many of them seriously — in the besieged Gaza Strip. Tomorrow has been declared by our Government as a national day of mourning in Palestine. The majority of those killed were taking part in a peaceful, non-violent demonstration — a peaceful, non-violent demonstration — to mark the forty-second anniversary of Land Day, commemorating events in which six Palestinians were killed in protest against Israel's illegal expropriation of thousands of dunums of Palestinian land in 1976, and to reiterate the right of return for Palestine refugees. In this regard, I recall that 70 per cent of Gaza's 2 million Palestinians are registered refugees whose right of return has been systematically been denied by Israel.

The names of some of the Palestinians tragically killed are Mohammed Najjar, age 25; Mahmoud Muammar, age 38; Mohammed Abu Omar, age 22; Ahmed Oudeh, age 19; Jihad Freneh, age 33; Mahmoud Saadi Rahmi, age 33; Abdelfattah Abdelnabi, age 22; and Ibrahim Abu Shaar, age 20; as well as Iyad Abdelal, Abdelqader Al-Hawajiri, Sari Abu Odeh, Hamdan Abu Amsheh, Jihad Abu Jamous, Bader Al-Sabbagh and Naji Abu Hjai, whose ages remain unknown. Moreover, earlier on Friday Omar Waheed Abu Samour, a farmer

from the Gaza Strip, was also killed by Israeli artillery fire while standing on his land near Khan Younis, just hours ahead of the peaceful and non-violent demonstrations.

There is nothing more repulsive than a massacre of unarmed, defenceless people, including women and children. Yet this is exactly what Israel, the occupying Power, has done and continues to do year after year ever since its inception. Those peaceful demonstrators posed no threat whatsoever to Israel or to its heavily armed soldiers. I repeat — those peaceful demonstrators posed no threat whatsoever to Israel or to its heavily armed soldiers. Yet, Israel's trigger-happy soldiers used live ammunition, tear gas and rubber bullets to shoot indiscriminately at those non-violent protestors, who were demonstrating inside the Gaza Strip near the site of the well-fortified barrier that separates them from Israel.

How can that be condoned? People who were demonstrating peacefully, as was their right to do under all elements of international law, including international human rights law, cannot be equated in any way with the belligerence, attacks and massacre committed by the Israeli armed forces. To those who would call for a balanced perspective, I say that there is no balance in this case. It was a case of armed forces unleashing massive power against unarmed civilian protestors demonstrating peacefully, leading to the massacre and the large number of casualties.

Today's protests were meant to kick off six weeks of peaceful protests leading up to the commemoration of Al-Nakba on 15 May. This year's commemoration of Al-Nakba will solemnly observe the passage of 70 years since more than 800,000 Palestinians — 70 per cent of our people at that time — were forcibly uprooted and expelled from their homes and lands or fled in fear for their lives after brutal massacres were carried out in over 400 Palestinian towns and villages by Zionist terrorist groups in Mandate Palestine, in a clear act of ethnic cleansing.

As is usual practice for Israel, today's vicious attacks by Israel against disarmed and unprotected Palestinian civilians were premeditated and deliberate. Israeli officials have been preparing the ground for these attacks with inciting, provocative and violent rhetoric. Such incitement even led to statements being made by human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, which issued a warning yesterday calling on the Israeli occupying forces to "refrain from using excessive force" following reports that it had deployed more than 100 snipers — as despicted in the Israeli media — with orders "to shoot anyone who breaches the wall between Israel and Gaza". In addition to the snipers, the occupying forces also sent armoured vehicles, sniffer and attack dogs, as well as hundreds of other occupying forces equipped with all sorts of lethal ammunition to use as they pleased and without regard to Palestinian lives in the Gaza Strip. We should not forget that the 2 million Palestinian civilians in Gaza already suffer immeasurably from Israel's 10-year blockade, which has led to a dire socioeconomic and humanitarian crisis.

It is more than clear, in words and deeds, that the latest the incitements of Israeli officials and the barbaric violence of its occupying forces against the rights and lives of the Palestinian people have little to do with Israel's so-called security and everything to do with maintaining its strangulating control over the lives of every Palestinian man, women and child living under its brutal occupation. It should be stated that the occupying Power's ongoing violent silencing of all Palestinian non-violent actions against its systematic dehumanization of the Palestinian people and the denial of their inalienable rights will never succeed. The people will continue to fight for their rights, including their rights to be free from occupation and to live in peace and security and with dignity.

Tragically, as we witness the events of today, in which tens of thousands of Palestinians are peacefully marching throughout the occupied State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, as well as among the Palestinian population living in Israel and in the diaspora, these events remind us that Al-Nakba did not end in 1948 and continues to this day. In this connection, it is beyond tragic that millions of Palestinians continue to live either in exile as refugees, denied the inalienable right to return to their homes, or under Israel's half-century belligerent military occupation of the State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, where they are forced to endure the constant violation of their fundamental human rights, including Israel's ongoing theft of Palestinian land for illegal settlements, its destruction of Palestinian homes and agricultural land, the revocation of residency rights, deportations, recurring brutal military assaults that have resulted in mass civilian casualties — such as those that took place in Gaza in 2008-2009, 2012 and 2014 — and the denial

of the internationally recognized legal right of return of millions of stateless Palestinian refugees.

We call on the Council to act swiftly to uphold its Charter duties and the integrity and authority of its resolutions in light of the violations of and provocations against the rights and legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people. The international community must condemn unequivocally and in the strongest terms Israel's criminal and illegal actions in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in the Gaza Strip. Israel must be held fully accountable for all of its crimes, including the most recent killings today of innocent Palestinian civilians, in accordance with international law and the principles of justice.

We welcome the requests made by many Council members for investigations of the Israeli occupation forces with respect to the massacre that has taken place today in the Gaza Strip. With the high number of deaths today, we call once more on the international community, particularly the Security Council, to act now to provide protection to the Palestinian people in order to avert more bloodshed and to save innocent Palestinian lives, and to defuse this volatile situation, which clearly constitutes a threat to international peace and security. The international community must uphold its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and to bring an immediate end to the occupying Power's military aggression.

As we have stated in the past, the Palestinian people cannot remain the exception to international commitments to and obligations under international law, including the obligation to protect civilians from atrocities and grave breaches, especially under foreign military occupation.

The President: As this may be the last meeting of the Council for the month of March, let me express the sincere appreciation and thanks of the delegation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the members of the Council, especially my colleagues the Permanent Representatives and their respective staff, and to the secretariat of the Council for all the support they have given to us.

It has been a busy month, and one in which we rallied to consensus on several important issues within our purview. We could not have done it alone or without the hard work, support and positive contributions of every delegation and the representatives of the Secretariat, as well as all the relevant conference service officers, interpreters and security staff.

As we end our presidency, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of Peru good luck in the coming month. Peru may rest assured that we will do our utmost in supporting it in fulfilling its grave responsibilities in the presidency of the Security Council in April.

The meeting rose at 8.50 p.m.